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May 27, 1963



MEMORANDUM FOR MR. McGEORGE BUNDT

The White House

Subject: Memorandum for the ESC Standing Group on Possible Soviet Initiatives to Send U-2 Aerial Reconnaissance over Cuba

Enclosed is a memorandum which Paul Ritzke and I have prepared to examine the question of possible Communist initiatives against our aerial reconnaissance, particularly short of shooting down a U-2. We would address the question whether at this time, or under what conditions, the Communists would decide that the need for action was so imperative that they would undertake one or more of these courses of action.

As in the case of earlier contingency studies with respect to Cuba, while we have used few members of our staffs this memorandum has not been fully staffed in either State or DOD nor seen by the JCS, and thus does not necessary represent the views of our respective Departments. Also, we are presenting this study in accordance with the desires of the Standing Group merely to provide a basis for discussion.

U. Alexis Johnson

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May 27, 1963

MEMORANDUM FOR THE NSC STANDING GROUP

SUBJECT: Possible Soviet Initiatives to End US
Aerial Reconnaissance Over Cuba

Problem:

To evaluate considerations involved and the various options available to the USSR and Cuba in seeking to end US aerial reconnaissance over Cuba.

Discussion:

The Soviet Union, and still more Castro's Cuba, wish the cessation of US overflights of Cuba. The issue at present is only in the background, and the Communists evidently do not feel it is desirable to raise their objection prominently until they think there is something they can do about it. They evidently recognize that the shooting down of a reconnaissance plane would probably provoke active countermeasures to which they could not effectively respond, and moreover not end the surveillance. Assuming that they continue to believe that they cannot with impunity use direct action to end the overflights, they may nonetheless turn to other measures in an effort to compel us to stop further reconnaissance. Moreover, they

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may believe that some such other measures may, even if unsuccessful in themselves, create a better foundation for shooting down a plane later.

Alternative Courses of Action:

There appear to be six possible lines of political action open to the Communists in attempting to get us to call off the aerial reconnaissance of Cuba:

- (1) Cuba could protest in the United Nations General Assembly and/or Security Council, calling for condemnation of the US action and for a cessation of the flights.
- (2) Cuba could bring action before the International Court of Justice, or seek UN action requesting an advisory opinion from the ICJ, calling for cessation of the flights.
- (3) The Soviets could initiate pressures elsewhere--such as Berlin, privately or publicly tying the new pressure to the continuing overflight of Cuba, and offering to relax the new point of tension in exchange for cessation of aerial reconnaissance of Cuba.
- (4) The Soviets could privately offer to withdraw all Soviet military personnel from Cuba in exchange for quiet dropping of aerial surveillance by the US.

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(5) The Cubans could publicly propose a trade-off allowing ground inspection in exchange for an end to aerial inspection, but we are sure they would not do this unless they also added in demands for ground inspection in Florida or elsewhere in the Caribbean.

(6) The Cubans could with discrete Soviet assistance, initiate aerial reconnaissance of some other area in the Caribbean--say, Guatemala or Mexico--on the grounds that offensive military action was being projected in those countries (as it had been before the Bay of Pigs attack), justifying and requiring Cuba to undertake this peaceful aerial inspection. Then, the Cubans could offer to call off their surveillance if we call off ours.

Action in the United Nations:

A Cuban protest in the United Nations, vigorously supported by the other Communist powers, would open up an issue which most people have forgotten. They would probably gain some support for the idea that indefinite aerial overflight and reconnaissance was an undue infringement of sovereignty and should be stopped. The US defense would rest on two bases: The OAS Resolution of October 23 authorizing such action, and the de facto resolution of the October crisis in which with forbearance the US settled for unobtrusive aerial reconnaissance

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instead of insisting on ground inspection. Therefore, it would not be necessary to rest our case on a general right to reconnaissance, and this should hold in line many states which would be unwilling to agree to any position which justified aerial reconnaissance over their own countries.

It seems unlikely that the Cubans could get the necessary two-thirds of the General Assembly or a majority of the Security Council to support them (in the latter case, of course, we would veto). In fact, we believe that the Cubans, and the Soviets, would not expect an initiative in the UN to end the overflights, and probably not even to garner enough votes to be useful propaganda against the US action.

Action by the ICJ:

Cuba has not agreed, and is not likely to agree, to compulsory adjudication by the International Court. If she did, there are a number of counter-suits which the US could initiate (expropriations of US properties, etc.). However, while the Cubans could not be sure of winning their case on the overflights, we could be even less sure of winning. Our defense would be the OAS Resolution of October 23, but if Cuba announced its complete severance from the OAS (which it has not yet done), it is doubtful that we would win.

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On balance, we think it unlikely that Cuba would submit its case to the ICJ, but if they did and we conceded jurisdiction to the Court, we could be in trouble.

Counterpressures:

The Soviets could create pressures elsewhere. In particular, they could attempt to gain support from our European Allies by making an end of reconnaissance over Cuba the price for warding off a new Berlin crisis. There are certain precedents for the Soviet policy of counterpressures, which would be more likely in a situation where the Soviets could better control the degree of tension than they could, for example, when there was a real crisis over Cuba. Nonetheless, it would appear unlikely that the Soviets would expect, or would succeed in rallying, much support in the West for a sellout on Cuban reconnaissance in exchange for relaxation of artificially generated tensions elsewhere.

Inducements:

If the Soviets and Cubans are sufficiently desirous of ending the overflights, they might approach us privately with an offer of some expendable quid pro quo. In particular, if they should decide that the continued presence of Soviet military personnel was not

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essential, they could offer the complete withdrawal of such personnel in exchange for an end of the overflights. They would, of course, have to consider that if the US refused, they would have tipped their hand on the negotiability of the continued Soviet military presence. Nonetheless, if they are sufficiently concerned, and do not believe they can force their way, they may attempt to buy it.

Presumably, our response would be insistence that the overflights continue until there was also active on-ground inspection, and that Soviet offers to withdraw their military only reflected growing awareness of the untenability of their position in having military men in Cuba in the first place.

Bargaining:

The Cubans could announce with much fanfare their readiness to accept ground inspection if aerial surveillance were ceased and if ground inspection were made of places which they believed were being used to mount offensive action against Cuba: the Bahamas, Florida, Puerto Rico, and perhaps others. If this approach followed protests by Cuba or in the UN, it might persuade some that the Cubans had a reasonable solution as well as a justified complaint.

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The US defense would be acceptance in principle of the encouraging Cuban indication of readiness to substitute effective ground inspection for aerial coverage, but rejection of any tie-in of the extraneous matter of alleged support for offensive actions against Cuba, and noting (in backgrounding) US clamp-down on Cuban exile activists. The OAS members would probably hold firm with us, but some might be willing to entertain the Cuban offer plus inspection against subversive training and export by Castro. All in all, the Cubans would be less likely now than in November to stir up much support for their position, and would probably not effectively create an impression of reasonableness sufficient to provide political justification for unilateral action to stop the overflights.

Sauce for the Goose:

The Cubans could tacitly embrace our own concept for justification, and turn it against us. They could announce that they were mounting aerial reconnaissance over some area where offensive forces had previously been mounted against them. Conceivably, they could carry reciprocal action to the point of announcing in advance their plans to overfly Dade County or Puerto Rico, but recognizing the greater risk in this initiative it seems more likely that they would pick

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Nicaragua, Guatemala, or the Dominican Republic for MIG-17 or B-26 overflight. They would probably announce their intention in advance in order to undercut our use of presumptive bombing attack as justification for immediate interception. If the United States undertook or supported the interdiction of Cuban reconnaissance flights, the Cubans would have a much stronger basis for an appeal to the UN complaining over Yankee attempts to apply a double standard. If we did not interfere, there would be substantial repercussions outside of Cuba and some pressures to agree to mutual cessation of reconnaissance overflights. Again in this case, the chief US defense would be the OAS Resolution of October 23.

Conclusions:

This quick survey of possible Communist initiatives to end US aerial surveillance of Cuba is not exhaustive, but includes the half-dozen most feasible courses they might consider. None of them appears so sure of success as to be immediately attractive, but such decision is also a product of the intensity of their desire to end the overflights, which it is difficult to measure.

The possible courses of action are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The Communists could concert a carrot and stick combination

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of UN action and pressures, for example. They could try several courses in turn. A counterpressure on our access to Berlin would pose greatest danger of direct confrontation with the USSR and would be the course most involving pressures on our NATO Allies.

Attached is an illustrative scenario, couched in terms of a memorandum to Khrushchev from his "staff," outlining one way in which the Soviets might combine some of the possible options described above.

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MEMORANDUM FOR COMRADE KHRUSHCHEV

SUBJECT: Considerations Involved in Eliminating US Reconnaissance Over Cuba

1. Problem.

To evaluate the considerations involved in a suggested course of action which seeks to eliminate US reconnaissance flights over Cuba.

2. Background.

a. When our miscalculations of US reaction to our emplacement of missiles in Cuba led to a critical confrontation in October 1962, common sense and ideological doctrine dictated immediate tactical retreat. Your decision to remove the missiles and aircraft from Cuba, together with the promise that adequate verification of removal and safeguards against re-entry would be provided, defused the critical aspect of the situation. Subsequently, it was necessary, as the talks of Comrade Mikoyan with Castro proceeded, to restore our image and win Fidel's reluctant acceptance of our unilateral decisions, by agreeing that we would not insist on on-site or in-port inspections. The only way in which this could be accomplished was to work out, tacitly, with the capitalists in Washington, an arrangement whereby we took no further action on US reconnaissance flights and the US did not press, through force, its demand for on-site inspection.

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b. This arrangement solved our immediate tactical problem. Now, however, the question arises whether the time has come to seek to eliminate the US surveillance flights which continue to exacerbate our relations with Fidel and which set a dangerous precedent by creating the impression before the world that capitalist nations have the right to protect themselves by conducting espionage operations through socialist skies.

3. Considerations.

a. Not only the problems cited above, but also the risk that the US may seek to use her U-2 flights to create an incident as an excuse for further action against Cuba, make it desirable to eliminate such flights or to take the initiative in creating an incident in order that we may structure it to suit ourselves.

b. The US domestic political situation and the USG's concern over our political flanking maneuvers in Latin America is such that the capitalist government may find itself increasingly motivated to take forceful action to overturn the revolution in Cuba. The October missile crisis taught us that, contrary to the advice of certain socialist circles, the US capitalist government can still find the courage to use force.

c. They are reinforced in their motivation to do so, and we in turn are restrained, by our mutual knowledge that the capitalist

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world at the present time has appreciably greater strategic power than does the socialist world.

d. Certain circles in our Government point to the need to take a hard line not only to support Fidel, but also to prove to the Chinese Communists and those who follow their lead that we Soviet Communists have not become soft. These circles, including certain deviationist leaders, even impugn the fitness of you, Comrade Nikita, to continue as our leader. Other circles clamor that the resource allocation problem is critical and that we must find a way to improve the yearning of our socialist citizens for an improved standard of living. And as you know, each time we heat up our relations with the decadent West, they tend to pull together, increase their defense expenditures, and force us to continue or increase our heavy defense burden.

4. Conclusion.

a. Cessation of US reconnaissance flights over Cuba is highly desirable, but any scenario for accomplishing this would have disadvantages and risks.

b. The capitalist preponderance of power makes a major confrontation unwise; our internal problems make it undesirable.

c. Ideological considerations make it necessary that we demonstrate firmness of resolve and Communist offensive spirit in connection with working out any detente with the US on this matter;

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yet the orchestration of this offensive must minimize the opportunity for the US to capitalize on our moves to overturn or further to harass Castro.

5. Optimum Course of Action.

If the Presidium decides that the elimination of U-2 flights over Cuba is sufficiently important to hazard the risks and accept the disadvantages, the following scenario is recommended:

a. The Soft Beginning. The offensive would be initiated by Fidel (to maintain the David/Goliath image), who would go to the UN with a demand that US violation of Cuban sovereignty by aerial overflight be discontinued. We would come to his support, reiterating the great efforts we had made to save the peace of the world by removal of our missiles and aircraft which were there to protect him from US aggression. We would remind the world that our patience is not unlimited and of the action we were forced to take against US U-2s which operated over our Fatherland in an earlier era. Pressures would be brought to bear from all circles. We would let it be known privately that the sole reason for the retention of USSR troops in Cuba is to protect that beleaguered nation from the designs of the US and that a detente involving the removal of these troops, cessation of U-2 flights, and a UN guarantee of Fidel's status sans offensive armaments could be worked out. (In actual fact, we should try to get a situation in

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which the U-2 flights stopped immediately and troop removals commenced in phases thereafter. This would appear to be a socialist victory and might permit us to find some pretext later for retaining a lower level of troops in Cuba.) We might have to settle for some arrangement in which the frequency of U-2 flights was slowed down as troop removals took place and ended when the last of our troops were out. It might also be necessary to permit a UN observation group to enter Cuba. We could insist in this event that the same group have access to other Caribbean countries which have been a base of subversion against Castro. Or alternatively, we could achieve a victorious connotation by insisting that the UN presence in Cuba provide for the integrity of Fidel's regime and Cuba's sovereignty.

b. Phase Two--Increasing Pressures. Having stated a convincing case, in the UN and before the world, of the inadmissibility of continued US reconnaissance over a sovereign and independent state, and the reasonableness of our proposed solution, and in the absence of US movement toward our proposals, we should accentuate pressures. The reasoned nature of our package should minimize the risk of US escalation against Castro as our pressures increase.

Our primary purpose during this phase would be to sow disarray among the US and her allies. We should let the UK in particular know privately that we are reluctant to do so but that action against

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Berlin may be necessary to bring the US around. We should urge the reasonableness of our Cuban package upon them, pointing out that they are really captive to US interests there which are based on concerns contrary to UK interests and no longer justified. We should hint that progress on test ban and increased trade are possible if we can achieve the better climate that cessation of Cuban overflights would bring. We should let the French and Germans know that Berlin is in new jeopardy because the US has refused to accept a reasonable proposal for Cuba and that our patience is not unlimited.

After these pressures have been brought to bear both privately and through the full force of our apparatus, we should let it be known that we are about to turn over the SAM sites to the Cubans and can no longer be responsible for their restraint. The frequency of our aerial penetrations of Norway, Alaska, and other NATO areas should be increased. These actions should be accompanied by new private warnings to the allies that harassments at Berlin must soon be forthcoming.

c. Final Phase--Will the US Blink? Our measures to date will have consisted of the careful spelling out of a reasonable proposal despite US intransigence, and of verbal pressures. The prospect seems excellent that the US will have been brought to the conference table at this point. If she has not, we will face the painful choice of terminating our scenario unsuccessfully or of risking more drastic

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measures. Our final choice would have to depend on our over-all evaluation of the degree to which we had been able to splinter the Western alliance, and of the resolve of the US Government. One choice that would seem clearly ruled out is the shooting down of a U-2, since that could provide the US with the excuse she may have been looking for to eliminate Castro. (For that reason, despite our threats to do so, we should not turn over the SAMs to Fidel in this time-frame, unless you have already become committed to do so, during his recent visit.) On the other hand the peculiar legalistic/Christian mores of the West would make it difficult for the US to justify an attack on Cuba for action taken by us elsewhere. One such action which could serve to establish the bona fides of our intentions, with the US and her allies, would be the shooting down of a US ECM espionage aircraft with the claim that it had violated our territorial waters. But the initiation of harassments at Berlin, of measured and careful nature, and after adequate and subtle development, would be more likely to provide the variety of pressures on the US that we would need. These interferences should not be escalated to serious levels but rather should be conducted in such a way that if the US does not give in over Cuban overflights we can use that intransigence to win some small improvement re Berlin.

d. Minimum Settlement. Our orchestration should not be initiated unless the accomplishment of our objective for Cuba seems

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reasonably probable. On the other hand, recognizing the enigmatic quality of the political equation involved, we must consider the minimum settlement we can accept. This is judged to be one in which you, Comrade Khrushchev, would be able to show some improvement over the status quo ante either in Cuba or in Berlin. If the conflicting interests of the US and her allies are skillfully played and pressures are artfully applied, this minimum objective should not be in doubt. The US Government could not conceivably escalate any of the measures in our scenario above, in one giant leap, into an invasion of Cuba. Our line of retreat should be assured by watching for the initial moves the US might initiate in seeking to justify that invasion. If our orchestration should lead to unmistakable signs of such US measures, we should seek promptly to settle for the minimum objective of having raised doubts of the responsibility of US policy in risking war and in aiming at aggression in the Caribbean.

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